

Message Text

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CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 6320

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, LA

SUBJECT: THE KING AND THE THAT LUANG FESTIVITIES

SUMMARY: THE CLOSE OF THE THAT LUANG FESTIVAL GAVE OCCASION FOR ONE OF KING SRI SAVANG VATHANA'S RARE VISITS TO VIENTIANE. HIS MAJESTY PARTICIPATED IN THE OATH-TAKING CEREMONY ON NOVEMBER 17; HANDED OUT MEDALS, WATCHED A TIKI MATCH AND HORSE RACES, MADE A TOUR OF THE FAIR PAVILIONS ON NOVEMBER 18; AND GAVE A PARTY FOR LE TOUT VIENTIANE ON NOVEMBER 19. HE WAS RENDERED PROPER RESPECT BY THE LAO COMMUNIS THROUGHOUT, THOUGH THE PATHET LAO FLAG WAS MUCH IN EVIDENCE. THE KING APPEARS READY TO PLAY HIS ROLE UNTIL THE END, WHILE THE COMMUNISTS SEEM CONTENT, FOR THE PRESENT, TO PROCEED IN THEIR CONSOLIDATION OF POWER AND TO AVOID ANY VIOLENT OR EXCESSIVELY HASTY ACTION IN THEIR EROSION OF THE MONARCHY. END SUMMARY.

1. THE THAT LUANG FESTIVITIES WHICH BEGAN NOVEMBER 4 WITH THE OPENING OF THE FAIR AND ENDED NOVEMBER 19 WITH RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES AND A ROYAL SOIREE ARE THE SUBJECT OF A SEPARATE CONFIDENTIAL

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USIS REPORT WHICH COVERS THE U.S. EXHIBITION IN SOME DETAIL.

THE PRINCIPAL EVENT, IN WHICH THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS DID NOT PARTICIPATE, WAS THE TAKING OF THE OATH OF FIDELITY TO THE SOVERIEGN BY THE MASTER OF CEREMONIES IN THE NAME OF ALL CIVIL SERVANTS AND NOTABLES OF ALL RANKS. THIS CEREMONY WAS PRESIDED OVER BY HIS EMINENCE, THE PHRASANGKHARA, AT VAT ONG TU ON NOVEMBER 17, FOURTEENTH DAY OF THE WAXING MOON OF THE TWELFTH MONTH OF THE YEAR OF THE HARE IN THE LAO BUDDHIST CALENDAR. OF CHIEF INTEREST TO THE MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS WERE THE FOUR OCCASIONS ON WHICH THEY SAW THE KING, AN AWARDS CEREMONY IN THE MORNING OF NOVEMBER 18, A TRADITIONAL LAO HOCKEY GAME (TIKI) AND HORSE RACES IN THE AFTERNOON OF THE SAME DAY, THE ROYAL TOUR OF THE FAIR PAVILIONS AFTER THE HORSE RACES AND THE ROYAL SOIREE ON NOVEMBER 19.

2. THE AWARD OF DECORATIONS TO 31 CIVIL SERVANTS, INCLUDING 14 WOMEN, WAS A LACKLUSTER AFFAIR ATTENDED BY AN HONOR GUARDIN PATHET LAO UNIFORMS WHO CARRIED BOTH THE ELEPHANT FLAG AND THE PATHET LAO FLAG AND WERE CLEARLY NOT MEMBERS OF ANY CRACK DRILL TEAM. APART FROM GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL COUNCIL MEMBERS, OTHER OFFICIALS AND THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS, THERE WERE PRACTICALLY NO SPECTATORS IN ATTENDANCE AT THE THAT LUANG ESPLANADE. ALL THE LAO PRESENT, INCLUDING PATHET LAO DIGNITARIES, CROUCHED DOWN AND PAID PROPER RESPECTS TO THE KING. THERE WAS NOTHING LIKE THE DISRESPECTFUL BEHAVIOR THAT HAD MARRED THE EARLY-SEPTEMBER BOAT RACES IN LUANG PRABANG. THE QUEEN, THE CROWN PRINCE AND PRINCESS, PRIME MINISTER PRINCE SOUVANNA PHOUMA, PRESIDENT OF THE KING'S COUNCIL PRINCE KHAMMAO AND HIS WIFE PRINCESS KHAMLA (SOUVANNA'S SISTER) WERE ALL PRESENT AT THE AWARDS CEREMONY.

3. THE QUEEN, BOTH PRINCESSES AND SOUVANNA PHOUMA SKIPPED THE AFTERNOON CEREMONIES. SUCH PATHET LAO CADRES AS PHOUN SIPRASEUTH, SINGKAPO, THAO MA AND KHAMPHAY BOUPHA WERE PRSENT THROUGHOUT ALL THE PROCEEDINGS. THE HOCKEY GAME AND HORSE RACES WERE UNEVENTFUL, ALTHOUGH THE ELEPHANT FLAG WAS CARRIED IN THE OPENING AND CLOSING CEREMONIES IN THIRD PLACE AFTER THE INTERNATIONAL BUDDHIST FLAG AND THE PATHET LAO FLAG.

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4. THE KING MADE A VERY THOROUGH TOUR OF THE PAVILIONS INCLUDING THE UNITED STATES PAVILION. HE GREETED ME IN A VERY WARM AND FRIENDLY MANNER, RECALLING MY EARLIER TOUR IN LAOS "SO LONG AGO." HE COMMENTED ON HOUSE CONSTRUCTION IN THE UNITED STATES, EXPRESSED ADMIRATION FOR THE ASTRONAUTS AND SHOWED SPECIAL INTEREST IN THE EXHIBIT ON ARTIFICIAL LIMBS AND THE "EYE-CONTROLLED" WHEEL CHAIR FOR PARALYZED PERSONS

DEVELOPED FROM THE SPACE PROGRAM. HE EXPLAINED THEM TO THE CROWN PRINCE WHO IN TURN EXPLAINED THEM TO OTHER MEMBERS OF THE PARTY. THE KING ALSO ENJOYED "THE GOLDEN AGE OF COMEDY," WHICH HE WATCHED FOR SEVERAL MINUTES.

5. THE PALACE INVITED ALL AMERICANS ON THE DIPLOMATIC LIST TO THE SOIREE AND EIGHT OF US ATTENDED. THE KING AGAIN GREETED ME IN A VERY FRIENDLY MANNER. THE ROYAL PALACE ORCHESTRA AND THE DANCE TROUPE OF THE NATIONAL FINE ARTS CONSERVATORY PERFORMED TRADITIONAL LAO MUSIC AND DANCES. THE ARTISTIC ENSEMBLE OF THE "PEOPLE'S ARMY OF LIBERATION OF THE XIENG KHOUANG REGION" DID A COUPLE OF VERY CHINESE COMMUNIST-LOOKING NUMBERS WHICH APPEARED TO BE ALL ABOUT GETTING IN THE CROPS AND MAKING THE REVOLUTION. THERE WERE A GENEROUS BUFFET AND LAMVONG DANCING OPENED BY THE CROWN PRINCE AFTER THE KING AND QUEEN WITHDREW.

6. COMMENT: THERE WAS SOME SPECULATION AMONG THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS ABOUT WHY THE KING AND THE PGNU WENT THROUGH ALL THIS CEREMONY IN WHAT MAY WELL PROVE TO BE THE LAST GASP OF THE MONARCHY. WE ASSUME THAT THE KING SIMPLY FEELS BOUND TO PLAY HIS ROLE OUT TO THE END IN ORDER TO MODERATE THE ACTIONS OF THE NEW REGIME AS LONG AS HE CAN OUT OF A SENSE OF DUTY TO HIS SUBJECTS. WE ASSUME ALSO THAT THE COMMUNISTS ARE PROCEEDING ACCORDING TO THEIR OWN TIMETABLE AND SEE NO NEED FOR VIOLENT OR EXCESSIVELY HASTY ACTION IN EVENTUALLY ELIMINATING THE MONARCHY.
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